The White Arcades (part two)

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The White Arcades (part two)

by Zigzagwanderer

Summary

The beginning of their post-fall domesticity, following on from part one.
The search for balance.

Notes

Just another big thank you to all who read/kudos/comment. I'm really grateful to you all.
xxxxx

The long, low bench in the end bathroom has been pulled underneath the window.

The tiles on all sides are glassy; perhaps they have been scrubbed more than is usual. They reflect the overlapping outlines of them both, hazy and molten as glaze in the kiln, Will rippling into Hannibal, Hannibal distorting into Will.

It is hard to tell where one creature ends and the other begins.

Hannibal strolls past Will and strips. Unrolls the bandage and dressing from his waist and lies down.

There are sharp things smiling brightly from a tray on the sill.

“If you would?”

The surgical incision has healed hastily, as if it wanted this. Not Will's pity, but his participation.
It is red on fading desert brown. Just another ribbon on a charmed hide, Will supposes. Nothing to concern the mythical eater of the innocent, as the bards of sensational crimes would have it; eater of the Dragon, and in the end, eater of the man who went foolishly fishing for monsters.

Will kneels by Hannibal’s side. Pushes up his shirt-sleeves. Hannibal’s focus sharpens upon this small uncovering. It flows both ways; they know where the weak spot is, now. Where the vulnerability is which should, in all sane worlds, get both monster and fisherman caught.

Hannibal crosses his wrists behind his head. To anyone else, he would appear serene.
But Will is conscious of Hannibal’s sweat. The antiseptic seems like an affront to the sweetness of it, and for a second Will is enraged at the specialists who have so recently handled Hannibal. Who have cut a sliver of him out.

Will pours alcohol over himself as far as the wrist.

He thinks about stitching them both together.
He does not mean in any metaphorical way.

A small cut each, perhaps, on the palm. Hannibal drawing thread though a needle while Will presses the openings together. A hand-fasting of clean cloth bindings, then long, long days of becoming joined. A slow dance, undivided, even for the most private of functions; witness to everything the other is. Shared, dark dreams.
They would separate themselves eventually, of course, picking the flesh apart to become themselves once again, but by then the desired damage would already have been done; there would be something irreparable about it, come what may, whether one was lost to the law, or the grave.
The scarring would be misshapen, an itching remembrance.

An ache, unfulfilled. Of a missing limb. A missing rib.

Will shifts his thighs where they are tensed and grinding against the bench.

“It’s all clean?”

Hannibal nods once, offering himself a little more.

He is not serene. There is a certain movement of Hannibal’s hips that Will dares to hope is involuntary, and entirely because of him. He sees it as he reaches over.

They are both trying to breath steadily.

With a pointed tool, Will lifts the first stitch until it rises, taut. He cuts to the side of the knot and pulls.
Hannibal swallows, but not in pain.
Will knocks his glasses back, tighter against his face, with his forearm. His skin feels hot, and scaly, his whole body in some kind of sympathetic state of clenched anticipation.

Their eyes touch, an unsterilized point of contact.

“Ok?”

Hannibal does not reply. Would it matter if he were not?

The second stitch is the same as the first.
The third stitch sticks. Requires tugging. Will wants to watch Hannibal’s mouth while he draws out the silk, but cannot. A redness appears on the white, Will touches his lip with his tongue, but then the other two stitches slip free easily, as they should, and it is done.

Oh, but how Will wants to taste. Run his teeth along the seam. He feels unsanitary, dizzy, hard. He flings the instruments away from himself with a clatter.
His hands hurt from being so cold, out in the wilds. From straining around the scalpel. From holding back.
Will licks the inside of his cheek. The ridge of flesh. He wants to ask if it is more satisfying to ruin or repair.

“You could have done this yourself.” Will's voice grates roughly against the sleek surfaces surrounding them.

“Yes.”

“But now you don’t have to? Is this where we discuss the philosophy of utility?”

Hannibal stretches a little more. Then sits up to swab over the site.
“Tsze-kung was told he was a little pot, and was disappointed, failing to understand that even a simple pot can be a sacred vessel.”

Will shuffles over to the chair in the corner. “I already know that you find me…precious.” He brings back Hannibal’s belongings. He is still on his knees. “And I don’t need Confucianism right now, either.”

Hannibal has high colour along both cheekbones. Which is not to say that he is struggling too.
“You require plain conversation, then? This is what you seek and yet scurry from? All the way to the end of your tether?”

A cloud moves somewhere out above the water and the bathroom suddenly fills with light. There is so much of it, forcing its way through the dimpled glass, that Will wants only to skid away and find somewhere safer to hide.

“My coming here may have implied…forgiveness.”

Hannibal takes the folded clothes that Will has managed to worry into a bundle. Cotton, and wool, and leather.

He stares down at the chaos Will has wrought. “Your coming here was a miracle.”

It is so close, so quiet, as the archipelago freezes around them, that Will can hear Sandy, tentative, concerned, scraping at the bottom step.
Anxiety versus a hopeful curiosity.

Will blinks his eyes open. Breaks. His fists flex. “Delicacy and dissemblance have destroyed us, and everyone around us. So, you will forgive *me* if I dread the consequences of speaking frankly. What exactly do you see happening, Hannibal? When we discuss the things we will have to discuss, eventually?”

Hannibal ruffles his hair as he pulls on the old, green sweater.
“The divan in the sitting room appears to be adequate, Will. I am sure you will sleep, or sulk, quite well down there upon occasion, with the dogs to keep you warm.”

Will sits back on his heels. “But I will hurt you. Now I know how. Now I know I can. Even if I don’t want to, or sometimes when I do. I can’t see a way forward that doesn’t hurt.”

But even as Will forms the fears into golems from their past, even as he hollows them out into ugly oubliettes, and mounds them up into inescapable prisons, they smooth down flat. The patterns of the tiles may be rearranged. The mosaic of looks, and words and touches from the last, few, poorly cast years can be remade; pieces of a beautiful whole, tempered and fired from the basest of clay.

Hannibal stands, almost dressed. He looks down at Will. “May I offer a final quotation?”
Will looks up. “If you must.”
“'A happy man lives with whom he loves, the happier man loves whom he lives with'. It is a peasant saying, as I recall. It may appeal to your currently rather...homespun sensibility.”

He helps Will up into his arms. Will shrugs, helplessly, “so things will work out because we’re stuck with each other?”
“Only as far as we want to be. I have lived the greater part of my life without *precious* things, Will. I could do it again. But I could not live for long without my heart.”

Will's hands are placed beneath the green wool, to feel the curve of the white arcades, beneath the imperfect hide. Like the iced bones of the forest, they will bear the weight, because they must.

Carefully, and not as a distraction, Hannibal kisses Will's throat. “I may yet learn how to slam doors," Hannibal warns Will. "To storm out.”
“Won’t work,” Will hisses, and allows Hannibal further access. "I have a history of tracking you down."

Will begins with Hannibal's belt, unbuckling it open again. He asks; "Are you occupied with anything right now? I could use a hand."

They go into the bedroom.
And this time, Will does not frown.

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